

Classic Mimbres Archaeology: A Contrastive Study of Two Sites at the Headwaters of the Upper Gila River

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Introduction

Located along Diamond Creek, Twin Pines Village (LA 75947) is a large multicomponent site, with the main habitation seen during the Classic Mimbres phase. This site is the largest Mimbres settlement within the region and likely served as the epicenter for social interaction between local populations of the Diamond Creek drainage and adjacent areas. In contrast, South Diamond Creek Pueblo (LA 181765), which is situated only five kilometers away, was established between South Diamond and East Diamond Creek as a small permanent four room residence with its living quarters suitable for a single extended family (Figure 1). This site had multiple habitations, with the last seen archaeologically during the Classic Mimbres phase. Over the past three years, New Mexico State University field schools have performed excavation research at these two sites. Our excavations and research have led us to understand the relationship between large and small scale Classic Mimbres phase sites.

Architecture

Latest domestic architectural evidence from Twin Pines indicates that the building techniques used for Classic Period structures are homogeneous with those found at other large villages throughout the rest of Mimbres region (Figure 2). That is, structural walls for pueblo rooms are stacked with river cobbles and then plastered and reinforced with adobe. While the two sites utilize the same construction materials in their architecture, South Diamond Creek Pueblo's architecture expresses divergent techniques that appear to be derived from neighbors to the north (Figure 3). For instance, intramural portions of walls at the site display the meticulous use of chinking stones positioned between wall segments to reinforce and stabilize the structure. This technique is usually associated with Northern Mogollon or Ancestral Puebloan groups and can be seen at places such as Chaco Canyon (Lekson 1986) or Grasshopper Pueblo (Reid and Whittlesey 1999). As the Diamond Creek drainage is seen as a cultural crossroads between Mimbres and Reserve Phase Mogollon populations, the dissimilarity in the architecture may be explained by local populations drawing on different regional or cultural traditions for guidance and inspiration for their building needs.



Figure 2: Twin Pines Architecture

Figure 3: South Diamond Creek Architecture

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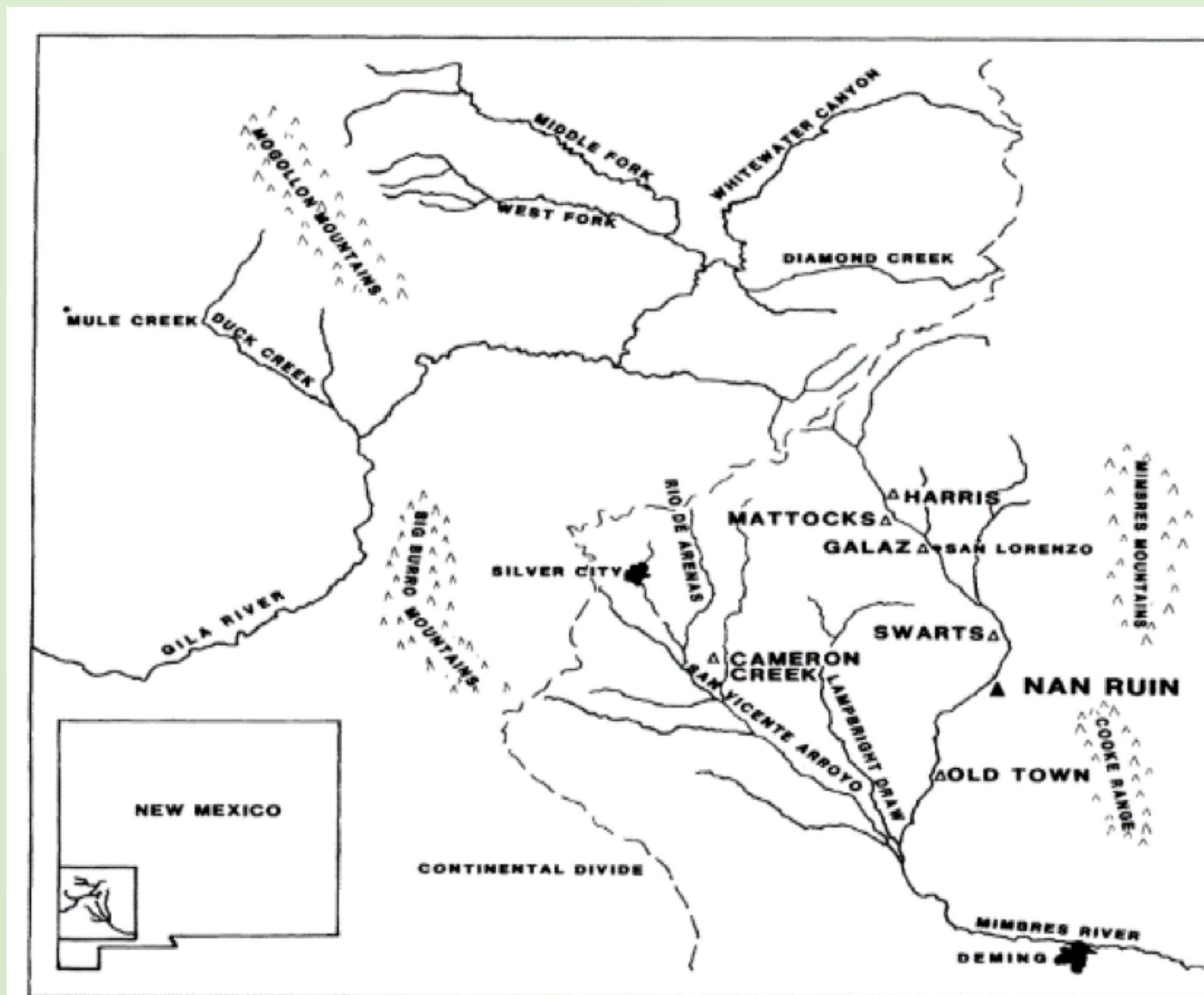


Figure 1: Partial map of the Mimbres Region that includes the Diamond Creek drainage
(Adapted from Shafer 1989)



Figure 4: Malachite, Turquoise, and Obsidian from Twin Pines and South Diamond Creek

Table 1: Pottery Assemblages for Twin Pines and South Diamond Creek. Cultural Areas Defined as MMG (Mimbres Mogollon) JMG (Jornada Mogollon) AP (Ancestral Puebloan).

Pottery Wares	LA Number	
	LA 74597	LA 181765
Mimbres Black - on - white, Boldface (MMG)	X	
Mimbres Black - on - white, Transitional (MMG)	X	
Mimbres Black - on - white, Classic (MMG)	X	X
El Paso Polychrome (JMG)	X	
El Paso Brown (JMG)	X	
Los Lunas Gray (AP)	X	
Gallup Black - on - white (AP)	X	
Lino Gray (AP)	X	X
San Marcial (AP)	X	X
Socorro Black - on - white (AP)	X	X

Sources

Pottery

Ceramic evidence from Twin Pines and South Diamond Creek demonstrates that the two sites manufactured many of the same Mimbres ceramic types (e.g. Style III Black-on-white or Mimbres Corrugated), they deviate in preference from non-local or trade wares. The Twin Pines Classic Period assemblage shows trade wares deriving from the Reserve Phase Mogollon, Jornada Mogollon, and Ancestral Puebloan ceramic traditions, whereas the South Diamond Creek assemblage contains Reserve Phase Mogollon and Ancestral Puebloan ceramics (Table 1).

Exchanged Goods

The proximity of Twin Pines and South Diamond Creek to one another, coupled with material evidence, suggests that there was trade between neighboring culture groups. The three major imports to these two sites were obsidian, turquoise, and malachite (Figures 4). The majority of the obsidian is coming from the Mule Creek Source (Duran 2017; Taliaferro 2004) - showing that this trade item was important to these two sites. Turquoise however, is harder to source with source locations so abundant throughout the American Southwest and Northern Mexico (Mathien 2000). These items, along with two copper bells found at South Diamond Creek, were imported into these sites for ritualistic, hunting and warfare purposes. These copper bells would have been traded into the site from Northern Mexico, questioning the relationship between the large site of Twin Pines, and the small site of South Diamond Creek.

Conclusion

Evidence from Twin Pines and South Diamond Creek Pueblo show that though these sites are within the same cultural region, and only five kilometers away, they are vastly different sites. These sites show a large trade network that demonstrates that they may have interacted between different neighboring cultural groups. This is shown in the similarity and dissimilarity within architecture, pottery, and exchanged goods. An example of this is seen in the architecture at South Diamond Creek and how it resembles that of Northern Mogollon or Ancestral Puebloan, whereas at Twin Pines Classic Mimbres architecture is similar to those at other large Classic Mimbres villages. We wonder whether different "scales" of Mimbres habitations in the Upper Gila would have been the major factor for these differences, or there might be alternative reasons. The first author will be addressing some of these differences in her thesis. Her thesis will be trying to determine if there was an exchange network between Twin Pines and South Diamond Creek Pueblo, using Mimbres Black – on – white Classic wares.